

# The Catholic Register.

"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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## FATHER PROULX.

Recollections of the Veteran Missionary.

Among the names of Pioneer Priests who established Catholicity on a solid footing, and gave its cherished and saving Doctrines permanency on Canadian soil, there is none more dear to memory or more deserving of honor than that of the Rev. Jean Baptist



THE LATE MGR. J. B. PROULX.

Proulx. In the parishes of Oshawa and St. Mary's, Bathurst street, Toronto, in the counties of North and South Ontario, along the shores of Georgian Bay and in the wigwams and forests of the great Manitoulin, Father Proulx's charities and deeds of daring and self sacrifice are still fresh in the grateful recollections of the communities which he either founded by his priestly zeal or benefitted by his unflinching ministrations.

From 1835, the year of his ordination until 1885, the year of his death, a whole half century of laborious and successful work must be credited to his account before the all great and all just rewarder, who promised that every good act, even the most trivial done in His name, would receive recompense a hundred fold in the Kingdom of Heaven. Rev. Father Proulx was born in Lachine, Province of Quebec, in May 1808. His father was descendant of that Admiral Proulx whose name figures among the hardy and venturesome mariners who first sailed from St. Malo in Normandy in search of new discoveries on the hitherto unknown coasts of the Western world beyond the seas.

After completing a successful course of classics in the College of St. Sulpice, Montreal, young Mr. Proulx not fully satisfied that he had a divine vocation to the priesthood, went to Kingston for the purpose of entering the College of Surgeons and acquiring the knowledge and practice of the healing art. While pursuing his medical studies he attracted the attention of Bishop A. Macdonell by his pious demeanour and personal attendance at every Church service. The Bishop meeting him one day on his way to college told him he ought to give up medicine and study theology, that spiritual physicians were in greater demand than M. D.'s and that he would do better service to

God and his country by studying for the Church and becoming a priest. The Bishop's advice had its due effect—for a few months afterwards Mr. Proulx was taken ill with fever, and when brought to Death's door, as he thought, he made a vow to God, that if his health were restored, he would become a priest, and devote himself to the conversion of the Pagan Indians in the Manitoulin Islands. After his recovery he proceeded to Montreal and entered the Grand Seminary, where he fitted himself by three years of hard study and prayer for his ordination to the priesthood. Rev. Bishop Lartigue, who was then in the fourteenth year of his episcopacy, conferred the order of priesthood on Rev. Jean Baptist Proulx in Montreal cathedral on the 26th July, 1835, and assigned to him the mission of Laprairie, which is quite close to the city, and where he sojourned but a few months, his intention remaining steadfast to keep his vow and devote all the vigour and energies of his young life to the task he proposed to himself of carrying the lamp of Divine Faith to

the benighted Indians of the Manitoulin. Bishop Lartigue being apprised of his determination made Sacred by a solemn vow, had no hesitation in granting the necessary exeat and recommendation to Bishop Alexander Macdonell, with whom he was already in high favour, and who sent him with all faculties of a missionary priest to Penetanguishene as the basis and starting point of future missionary work.

Father Proulx often related to his brother priests gathered round him in family circle or when convened at his always hospitable home in Oshawa or Toronto, the many and all but insuperable difficulties he had to overcome before he could notice any evident or tangible signs of a change in the minds or habits of his neophytes. It took him a whole year to master the several dialects of the tribes that were scattered over the islands. In the meantime his medical knowledge was of immense advantage. It obtained for him an entry into every wigwam, besides creating for him the same reverential regard and almost unlimited confidence which they entertained for their own Medicine Man. When called to prescribe for children he always baptized them in case of danger, and before leaving made a present of a candle to the parents who used torches or rush lights, and who were very much gratified by his munificence. After the conversion of the latter, he explained that their child, whom he had baptized privately, was praying for them in heaven and had obtained from God the grace of their change of heart. The parents often admitted that if previous to conversion they had suspected his work of baptism they would have considered themselves bound in conscience to put him to death. As he was always kind to children and had little presents for

them, he had no difficulty in gathering a large number for school and catechism. He also taught them beautiful French hymns translated into Indian, which they all sang in unison at the school or in the little church which he built and where he said Mass every Sunday and every day when possible.

Once the children were turned over and the parents rejoicing in the change of manners and habits and in the education of their children, the conversion of the whole tribe was assured. To the assistance Father Proulx obtained from his knowledge of medicine and from his kindness of disposition and gentle character, may be added his physical strength and muscular superiority. He was three or four inches above six feet in height, and was of proportionate build and measure as to size. Besides reverencing him as a medicine man they dreaded to encounter him singlehanded or even in groups. On one occasion when he baptized a dying infant in the cabin of a pagan Indian, he overheard an old witch at the fire reproach the braves who sat near her, that they allowed their child to be taken from its parents and people in the next life, and to be compelled to spend eternity in the hunting grounds of the white men. He saw the braves reach for their tomahawks, when assuming an air of great friendliness he challenged the strongest to wrestle with him. He cast them to the ground one after the other, then he said in threatening manner and with angry voice "What! you think you kill me? I tell you now to thank your God you did not by violent hands on me. If I through my religion did not kill you, my Christian Indians in the other camps would avenge my death and scalp you and burn your wigwams and your corn and all you have." The terrified Indians shrunk into the corners of their cabin and never afterwards had the courage to molest him.

When all the tribes were assembled to receive their government allowance on one occasion, the Pagans set a ferocious dog on him as he passed by their camp. As the dog sprang at him, Father Proulx, instead of showing fear, grasped the dog by the throat with his right hand and pounded it on the nose with his closed left fist, while the dog howled at every blow. Finally he cast the cur away from him, which ran yelping under a friendly tent.

During ten years of painful service and hard missionary labours Father Proulx acted the part of Father and Apostle among his cherished Indians, whom he accompanied in their nomadic expeditions by land and water and in all seasons. More than once he scooped out for himself a bed in a bank of snow and read his breviary by the light of forest fires, kindled no less for partial comfort against cold than for protection against the wolf and the bear. Every inlet and bay of Lake Huron, with its hidden reefs and shoals, were known to his practised eye, and on several expeditions and fishing excursions he traversed with his Indians in frail canoes its vast expanse of waters in most tempestuous weather.

In 1846, two Jesuit Fathers, commissioned by Bishop Power of Toronto to relieve him of his mission, arrived at Wickwemikong, the chief station on the Manitoulin. Father Proulx very

reluctantly complied with the Bishop's desire to bring him to Toronto and abandon the fruit of his labours and pruning during ten years of successful missionary toil and triumph.

His heartfelt affection for the untutored Aborigines whom he had rescued from Pagan darkness and trained in the ways of Christian piety, was fully reciprocated by his neophytes who had named him the "sweet preacher" and "the man of God." They flocked by thousands to the pier on the morning of his departure, and Pagans mingled with Catholic Indians exhibiting signs of grief and sorrow; a tearful adieu, shouting their sad farewells as the vessel which bore him moved out into the misty lake. In after years even so late as 1874, when troubles arose in the Islands and bloodshed was threatened, on account of mis-understandings with the Canadian officials, Father Proulx was deputed by the Government of the day, to act as peace maker between the justly irritated chiefs and the officers of the law. His presence at Wickwemikong was the signal for quiet submission to authority and for the settlement of difficulties by just arbitration. The four principal chiefs who led the revolt against what was deemed by them unjust exaction, consented to lay down their arms and a company Father Proulx to Ottawa, where satisfactory explanations were given on both sides and peace was restored and order once more reigned at Wickwemikong.

On Father Proulx's arrival at Toronto in 1846 he was appointed pastor of Oshawa with jurisdiction extending north as far as Georgian Bay and east as far as Highland Creek.

He was not long however in possession of his new parish among civilized white men, when he was summoned to Toronto. Famine and fever laid waste the fertile valleys of Ireland in that fatal year, and forced its unwilling victims to perish by the roadside, or emigrate to, what was known in those days as the "cold and inhospitable shores of Canada." In their hurry to escape famine thousands were huddled into sailing vessels in which proper accommodation was not found for hundreds. Ship fever broke out amongst them, hundreds died and were cast overboard, hundreds were quarantined at the island of Orleans near Quebec, and other hundreds were landed at Montreal, Kingston and Toronto. Fever sheds were hastily erected in all those landing places, and few escaped death or contagion of the thousands who left their sad homes in the hope of bettering their condition in the new world. Many priests risked their lives and not a few succumbed to the horrors of the plague, while administering the last sacraments to the dying and burying the dead. Father McGauran, afterwards pastor of St. Patrick's in Quebec, was quarantined with the dead and dying in the Island of Orleans. Father De Charbonnel, afterwards Bishop of Toronto, attended to the patients in Montreal. Bishop Power fell a victim to his zeal in the fever sheds of Toronto. Father Proulx left Oshawa for this city and filled the gaps made by sickness and death in the ranks of the clergy of Toronto. His Herculean frame and vigorous health, inured to privations and sleepless toil, bore him safely through dan-